

Remarks

The Examiner has rejected applicant's claims 16-17, 22 and 24 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as anticipated by the Saito patent (US Patent No. 6,317,878). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Applicant's amended claim 16 recites a client terminal in which a software including a plurality of functions is installed and which is capable of communicating with a server apparatus, the terminal comprising: a setting unit, which sets for each the plurality of functions an enabled-state flag indicating that the function is usable or a disabled-state flag indicating that the function is unusable, wherein the function with the enabled-state flag is to be subjected to charging; a payment unit, which executes, every first predetermined period, payment processing of a predetermined price of the function with the enabled-state flag set by said setting unit; a time count unit, which counts a period in which the function with the enabled-state flag remains unused; a prohibition request unit, which automatically requests the server apparatus to prohibit use of the function which remains unused if the period counted by said time count unit exceeds a second predetermined period; a changing unit, which changes the enabled-state flag of the function which remains unused to the disabled-state flag in response to a response from the server apparatus to the request by said prohibition request unit; an icon display unit, which displays icons respectively corresponding to the plurality of functions such that each icon distinguishably shows whether the corresponding function is usable or unusable, in accordance with the enabled-state flag or the disabled-state flag set by said setting unit; and a permission request unit, which, in response to a user instruction, requests the server apparatus to permit use of the function with the flag changed

from the enabled-state flag to the disabled-state flag by said changing unit, wherein, if said changing unit changes the enabled-state flag of the function which remains unused to the disabled-state flag, said icon display unit changes a display status of the icon for that function, and wherein said changing unit changes the disabled-state flag of the function which remains unused to the enabled-state flag in response to a response from the server apparatus to the request by said permission request unit, and said payment unit executes the payment processing of the predetermined price of that function. Independent claims 22 and 24 have similar features

As set forth above, in applicant's invention of amended claim 16, a client terminal communicates with a server apparatus and comprises a setting unit, a payment unit, a time count unit, a prohibition unit, a changing unit, an icon display unit, and a permission request unit. The setting unit sets, for each a plurality of functions, an enabled-state flag indicating that the function is usable or a disabled-state flag indicating that the function is unusable, wherein the function with the enabled-state flag is to be subjected to charging. The payment unit executes, every first predetermined period, payment processing of a predetermined price of the function with the enabled-state flag. The time count unit counts a period in which the function with the enabled-state flag remains unused. The prohibition request unit automatically requests the server apparatus to prohibit use of the function which remains unused if the period counted by the time count unit exceeds a second predetermined period. The changing unit changes the enabled-state flag of the function which remains unused to the disabled-state flag in response to a response from the server apparatus to the request by the prohibition request unit.

The icon display unit displays icons respectively corresponding to the plurality of functions such that each icon distinguishably shows whether the corresponding function is usable or unusable, in accordance with the enabled-state flag or the disabled-state flag set by the setting unit. The permission request unit requests, in response to a user instruction, the server apparatus to permit use of the function with the flag changed from the enabled-state flag to the disabled-state flag. If the changing unit changes the enabled-state flag of the function which remains unused to the disabled-state flag, the icon display unit changes a display status of the icon for the function. The changing unit changes the disabled-state flag of the function which remains unused to the enabled-state flag in response to a response from the server apparatus to the request by the permission request unit, and the payment unit executes the payment processing of the predetermined price of that function.

As can be appreciated from the above, the client terminal of the present invention is used with a system in which users are charged a predetermined amount every predetermined period, e.g., every month, for use of desired functions. The users can use any functions without limits (e.g., the number of printed sheets), if they pay fees regularly (e.g., monthly). It may be desirable to automatically prohibit the use of a function which has not been used for a predetermined period so as to avoid any undesirable charging. When such function becomes necessary, the user can manually place the function in a usable state at any time. Those functions are realized by the time count unit, the prohibition request unit, the changing unit, and the permission request unit as claimed.

The construction of applicant's claimed invention is not taught or suggested by the cited Saito patent. The Examiner cites FIG. 2 of the Saito patent and paragraphs C5-C6 of the patent as disclosing applicant's claimed setting unit, payment unit, time count unit,

prohibition request unit and changing unit. The Examiner further cites FIG. 7 and paragraphs C5-C10 of the patent as disclosing applicant's claimed icon display unit and permission request unit and certain additional functions of applicant's claimed changing unit and payment unit.

Applicant disagrees with the Examiner's above analysis of the Saito patent. As can be appreciated from FIGS. 5A and 5B and the discussion in columns 5 and 6 of the Saito patent, the patent discloses a system in which when the power supply of a document assembly system is first turned on, the system enables all the flags of the expanded facility management table providing user access to all expanded facility programs. (Col. 6, lines 5-13 and 53-61). When the power supply is subsequently again turned on, the system determines the time from when the power supply was first turned on. (Col. 6, lines 14-19). If the elapsed time has not reached a specified time, the flags of the expanded facility management program remain on, thereby providing continued user access to the expanded facility programs. (Col. 6, lines 19-22; Col. 7, lines 5-21). However, if the elapsed time has reached the specified time, then all the flags of the expanded facility management table are disabled, thereby denying user access to any of the expanded facility programs. (Col. 6, lines 23-41 and 62-65; Col. 7, lines 21-25). In the latter case, if a user pays a fee and provides key data for a specific expanded facility program, the state of the program is changed from the disabled to the enabled state and access to the program is granted to the user. (Col. 6, lines 42-52 and 65-67; Col. 7, lines 1-4).

Thus, the system of the Saito patent does not teach or suggest a setting unit, which sets for each the plurality of functions an enabled-state flag indicating that the function is usable or a disabled-state flag indicating that the function is unusable, wherein the function with the enabled-state flag is to be subjected to charging. Instead, in the Saito patent, just the opposite

is taught. In particular, in the Saito patent, enable state flags are set for a predetermined period of time from first turning on the power supply indicating that the expanded facility programs are usable without being subject to charging. Also, in the Saito patent, the disabled state flags are set after a specified time has elapsed from first turning on the power supply indicating that the expanded facility programs are usable with the charging of a fee.

Moreover, the Saito patent fails to teach or suggest a payment unit, which executes, every first predetermined period, payment processing of a predetermined price of the function with the enabled-state flag set by said setting unit. In the Saito patent, when all the facility program flags are set to enable, no fee is being charged for access to the expanded facility programs. Moreover, a fee is only paid in order to change a disabled flag to an enabled flag to gain access to a program. In neither of these situations is there execution every predetermined period of payment processing with the enabled flag set.

The Saito patent also fails to teach or suggest a time count unit, which counts a period in which the function with the enabled-state flag remains unused. Instead, in the Saito patent, the period counted is the elapsed time from the first time the power supply is turned on and there is no counting of a time in which a program with an enable state remains unused.

The Saito patent, therefore, also cannot and does not teach or suggest a prohibition request unit, which automatically requests the server apparatus to prohibit use of the function which remains unused if the period counted by said time count unit exceeds a second predetermined period. Nor can it teach or suggest a changing unit, which changes the enabled-state flag of the function which remains unused to the disabled-state flag in response to a response from the server apparatus to the request by said prohibition request unit.

Finally, the Saito patent is not believed to teach or suggest an icon display unit, which displays icons respectively corresponding to the plurality of functions such that each icon distinguishably shows whether the corresponding function is usable or unusable or wherein, if said changing unit changes the enabled-state flag of the function which remains unused to the disabled-state flag, said icon display unit changes a display status of the icon for that function, in accordance with the enabled-state flag or the disabled-state flag set by said setting unit. Nothing in FIG. 7 or in column 7 of the Saito patent is believed to show such an icon display unit.

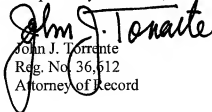
Applicant's independent claims 16, 22 and 24, and their respective dependent claims, all of which recite all of the above features, in one form or another, thus patentably distinguish over the Saito patent.

In view of the above, it is submitted that applicant's claims, as amended, patentably distinguish over the cited art of record. Accordingly, reconsideration of the claims is respectfully requested.

Dated: January 21, 2009

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